

Abuse at Galen Facility

Only 90 days after DPHHS opened its new "Forensic Mental Health Facility" at Galen, Montana, facility staff are struggling to understand the distinction between a hospital and a prison.

A video recording of patient abuse occurring on June 16, 2016, was reviewed by DRM staff on July 12. The video shows a nurse ordering a patient who had broken a sprinkler head to be immediately punished by a force of 12 men forcing him to the floor, restraining him in a "security blanket" (basically, a straight-jacket with no sleeves), and strapping him to a gurney.

The video shows the nurse herself injecting him with sedative drugs, and then 11 men strapping him down to a restraint bed within an isolation room, and then modifying the restraint straps with a power drill to make the restraints tighter on this small patient.

The nurse is clearly heard on the recording explaining to the patient that he is being drugged, strapped to a bed, and locked in an isolation cell as punishment, and promising him that she will punish him in this way every time he causes trouble.

DPHHS sent letters to Disability Rights Montana dated July 15, and July 25, 2016, stating that DPHHS will not "authorize" release of the video recording, despite the patient's demand that the video be made public to reveal the systematic abuse of persons who are placed in institutions, instead of communities.

Licensing records maintained by the Montana Board of Nursing show that this same nurse was previously disciplined in 1999 for "Incompetence," "Practicing beyond the scope of practice," "Violation of federal or state statutes, regulation or rules," and "Substandard or inadequate care." Despite her prior professional misconduct, and despite the incident on June 16, 2016, she remains employed by DPHHS on active nursing duty to this day at the State Hospital.